



Scottish Association of Law Centres

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## **Scottish Association of Law Centres (SALC) – Response to the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee: Call for Views for the Inquiry into Civil Legal Aid in Scotland**

The Scottish Association of Law Centres (SALC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this important inquiry. SALC is uniquely placed to offer a comprehensive perspective on the operation and challenges of Scotland's legal aid system. Our member law centres work daily on the frontline of legal advice provision, assisting some of the most disadvantaged individuals and communities in Scotland. Drawing on decades of collective experience, we are well equipped to highlight both the strengths and limitations of the current legal aid framework, particularly from the standpoint of social justice and access to rights.

This submission provides a high-level summary of key themes and concerns shared by SALC member law centres. It reflects common challenges faced across our network and offers core recommendations to support a more equitable and effective legal aid system. Individual law centres will be submitting their own responses, containing more detail and local insights to complement this collective overview.

### **1. What are the current barriers to accessing civil legal assistance? Can you give examples from your own experience, or refer to any research in this area?**

#### **1. Insufficient Availability of Legal Aid Providers**

One of the most significant barriers to accessing civil legal assistance in Scotland is the widespread lack of available provision. In many parts of the country, particularly outside major urban centres, there is little to no access to solicitors offering civil legal aid in critical areas such as housing, immigration, and welfare law. This geographical and subject-matter imbalance creates areas where individuals face almost insurmountable difficulties in securing the legal support to which they are entitled.

Demand for legal aid outstrips available resources in areas of social welfare law handled by law centres. In housing and homelessness cases, individuals at risk of losing their homes face challenges due to a shortage of solicitors working under legal aid funding. Immigration and asylum legal support is similarly limited—while Glasgow has decent provision, availability elsewhere in Scotland is sparse.

#### **2. Consequences of Limited Provision**

The shortage of available solicitors forces many individuals to either represent themselves in courts and tribunals—often struggling with complex legal frameworks. This can result in poorer outcomes, increased pressure on the judicial system, and longer case resolution times. People also often either do not pursue or abandon their cases altogether. This situation not

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only affects them directly but also has broader consequences for the community, as inadequate practices go unchallenged and legal standards decline.

The pressure on the few solicitors who do offer civil legal assistance is intense. Rising caseloads, inadequate remuneration, and financial insecurity contribute to high levels of stress and burnout disproportionately affecting those working within legal aid practices.

According to the Law Society of Scotland, approximately one-third of legal aid practitioners are expected to retire within the next decade. The numbers entering the profession do not match those leaving. Legal aid practitioners should receive salaries and working conditions comparable to those of solicitors in other publicly funded roles, such as the Civil Legal Assistance Office (CLAO), the Public Defence Solicitors' Office (PDSO), and other public sector legal posts. Aligning pay in this way would support staff retention and improve sustainability within the third sector. Without such parity, it will remain difficult to attract and retain skilled professionals in civil legal aid, despite the vital public interest work they undertake.

### 3. Financial Eligibility Criteria

Even where legal aid providers are available, overly restrictive financial eligibility rules exclude many people on low incomes. The Scottish Association of Law Centres has called for a comprehensive review and reform of the financial thresholds for advice and assistance (A&A), as set out in our [September 2024 briefing](#).

The current thresholds require to be reviewed and updated. Individuals in financial hardship often find themselves ineligible for support, even when they clearly cannot afford to pay for legal advice privately. Specific problems include:

- **Young adults and students:** Current rules require the aggregation of parental income for applicants under the age of 25, regardless of whether they live with or are financially supported by their parents. This undermines the autonomy and privacy of young adults, who are legally responsible for themselves in all other respects. They may be reluctant—or unable—to discuss sensitive legal matters with parents, and this rule creates a serious barrier to confidential legal support.
- **Pensioners and Means Testing:**
  - (a) Entitlement to **Pension Credit** should be treated as a **passporting benefit** for Full Civil Legal Aid.
  - (b) Pensioners whose sole income consists of the **State Retirement Pension** and **disability-related benefits** (e.g., Attendance Allowance or PIP) should be exempt from income-based contributions to legal aid. While capital contributions may still be appropriate where assets exist, requiring income-based contributions from pensioners in these circumstances is unfair and impractical.
- **Capital limits:** An individual in receipt of a passport benefit or with less than £245 per week in disposable income may still be ineligible for A&A if they have more than £1,716 in capital, including savings. In our experience, this threshold excludes many clients who hold modest savings for essential or emergency use. For people on low incomes, particularly those living with disabilities, these savings often act as a necessary buffer against destitution or unexpected costs.

Instead of requiring individuals to undergo an intrusive and burdensome financial assessment to explain why these modest savings should not be treated as disposable, the system should incorporate a more realistic allowance. A higher capital threshold—with a reasonable amount automatically disregarded—would protect clients' ability to manage future risk while also enabling access to justice. This is particularly important in cases where clients face structural disadvantages or long-term financial insecurity.

We submit that there is a strong case for financial eligibility criteria to be waived in certain types of cases. There is already precedent for adapting these criteria in specific areas, such as Fatal Accident Inquiries and Mental Health Tribunals. Similarly, flexibility should be extended to homelessness-related, disability, and equality cases, where individuals frequently lack the financial means or capacity to represent themselves. Given the high stakes in these matters, ensuring accessible legal support is essential to uphold justice and fairness.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the key barriers to accessing civil legal assistance in Scotland are:

- The severe shortage and uneven distribution of legal aid providers
- Unsustainable working conditions driving practitioners out of the system
- Restrictive and outdated financial eligibility criteria

These structural barriers have real-world consequences for people who are most in need of legal support. A fairer and more accessible system must address both the capacity of providers and the eligibility rules that govern access to assistance. Without targeted reform in both areas, legal aid risks becoming inaccessible in both principle and practice.

## **2. Do you have any suggestions for shorter-term improvements (not involving changes to the Legal Aid (Scotland) Act 1986) which could be made to the current system for civil legal assistance?**

We welcome the opportunity to offer suggestions for practical, shorter-term improvements to civil legal assistance that do not require legislative change but could have immediate, meaningful impact on access to justice. These proposals are grounded in the direct experience of our member law centres and solicitors working daily with clients who face legal problems in housing, immigration, social security, and other areas of public law.

While structural reform is crucial, several administrative and procedural changes—particularly in the areas of Advice and Assistance (A&A) and Full Civil Legal Aid—could significantly reduce delays, unnecessary bureaucracy, and financial barriers for both clients and solicitors. This submission provides a high-level summary of priority areas for shorter-term improvements to the civil legal assistance system. We consider these proposals do not require legislative reform but would deliver an immediate and measurable impact on the sustainability, accessibility, and effectiveness of civil legal aid in Scotland. Individual law centres may also submit supplementary responses with case-specific examples.

We summarise our key proposals as follows:

### **1. Fee Levels and Remuneration**

#### **Inadequate Rates**

Current legal aid fee rates remain far below sustainable levels, despite recent modest uplifts. The Evans Review recommended research into appropriate legal aid remuneration, but this

has yet to be undertaken. Legal aid solicitors continue to face structural underpayment that threatens the viability of the sector.

Examples include:

- Hourly rate for civil A&A: **£63.88**
- Flat rate for short letters or calls: **£3.64**
- Letters: **£9.10 per 250 words**

In contrast, solicitors acting for non-legally aided parties routinely charge **£180 and above per hour**, exclusive of VAT. Additionally, private practice allows firms to bill for the review of work by senior staff—an essential quality assurance measure that is not available under legal aid. The current system also fails to differentiate between levels of experience, applying the same rates to newly qualified and senior solicitors alike. This undermines efforts to retain experienced staff and disincentivises long-term careers in legal aid.

**Recommendation:** An evidence-based and meaningful uplift in legal aid fee rates is essential to attract and retain skilled practitioners.

## **2. Advice and Assistance (A&A) – Simplifying Access and Funding**

### **Unrealistic Initial Expenditure Limits**

The authorised expenditure limits for A&A are too low to support even basic work:

- **£135** for standard cases.
- **£50** for "diagnostic" grants (limited scope).

For example, in immigration matters, an initial meeting with an interpreter can exceed £200. As increases cannot be applied retrospectively, solicitors must apply in advance or risk being unpaid. This discourages engagement in legal aid work, especially in urgent or complex matters.

**Recommendation:** Increase initial authorised expenditure levels to reflect the true cost of initial advice and ensure retrospective approval is possible in justified cases.

## **3. Reducing Bureaucracy and Administrative Duplication**

### **Replace the 'Increase' System with Template-Based Authorisation**

The current increase system is inefficient and duplicative. Solicitors must justify routine activities, such as client meetings, correspondence, or interpreter use, instructing expert reports—in advance. These are then reviewed again during final account assessment, creating a **double audit**.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Significantly expand the use of templates, including expansion for case types, e.g. there are currently no templates for discrimination and equality-based claims.
- Update template values regularly to reflect actual costs and account for inflation for outlays, the cost of which are outwith the solicitor's control.
- Eliminate one layer of audit: either the **prospective approval** (increase) or the **retrospective account scrutiny**, particularly where template authorisation has been granted.

This would reduce the time and resources required by both solicitors and SLAB, while preserving accountability and restoring trust in the regulated legal profession.

## 4. Full Civil Legal Aid – Streamlining the Application and Management Process

### Overly Complex Application Requirements

Applications for full civil legal aid currently require:

- Two signed forms (solicitor and applicant)
- Client precognition
- Two statutory memorandums
- Third-party statements
- Extensive financial documentation

This is excessive, especially in urgent cases or where clients face digital or language barriers or have physical or mental health issues.

**Recommendation:** Streamline the application process by:

- Eliminating the requirement for client precognition.
- Allowing solicitors to provide a single summary form outlining the nature and legal basis of the case.

### Clarifying Special Urgency Procedures

The current distinction between SU2 and SU4 categories is opaque and inconsistently applied. This can delay access to justice and hinder urgent court action.

**Recommendation:** Simplify and consolidate guidance on special urgency applications to ensure clarity for practitioners.

### Reducing Form Burden in Case Management

Solicitors must navigate multiple forms ('Amend', 'Stage Report', 'Sanction') depending on the case update needed. This is especially confusing for newer practitioners and delays essential casework.

**Recommendation:** Introduce a **single, unified case update form** to simplify requests for sanctions, amendments, or new developments.

## 5. Accounts and Abatements – Creating Efficiencies and Restoring Fairness

### Abolish the Double Audit

The current system requires:

1. Advance justification of work through increase requests, and
2. Line-by-line final accounts through the Legal Aid Online (LAOL) platform at accounts submission stage.

Solicitors must record every activity—meetings, calls, preparation, travel—along with start/stop times and narrative justifications. This process:

- Consumes hours of unpaid solicitor time or requires dedicated admin staff or law accountants, incurring additional non-recoverable costs.
- Has been made more onerous since **December 2024**, when SLAB began requiring exact **start and stop times**, even for calls or interrupted work.

**Recommendation:** Simplifying the accounting system by replacing line-by-line entries with summary billing up to the pre-approved expenditure limit would eliminate the double audit process, reducing administrative burdens and saving time for both firms and SLAB. In cases where the work outlined in the funding template has not been fully undertaken, a simple

reconciliation process or exception reporting mechanism could be introduced to ensure accountability and fairness for both the provider and SLAB.

### **Excessive Fee Abatements and Unpaid Work**

Even when solicitors secure pre-approved funding, SLAB frequently **abates fees** based on subjective assessments—for example, where a meeting is considered to have lasted “too long” or where an item is judged “unnecessary.” Solicitors must then spend unpaid time disputing these decisions, often for little financial return. This practice undermines confidence in the system and disincentivises legal aid participation.

SLAB also routinely disallows critical but **non-chargeable activities**, including:

- Completing eligibility forms
- Legal research
- Updating clients on case progress
- Listening to and responding to voicemails

These tasks are essential to delivering effective legal representation.

We also note that under Advice and Assistance, solicitors are **not paid for listening to or responding to voicemails**, despite there being no clear legal or policy justification for this. Voicemail communication is a core part of modern legal practice and is no different in principle from email, letters, or in-person conversations. Time spent reviewing client messages and providing follow-up is often considerable and should be properly recognised and compensated.

More broadly, legal aid solicitors are increasingly applying a **trauma-informed approach**, which is necessary, particularly when working with clients who have experienced poverty, violence, or persecution. These approaches involve building trust, explaining complex legal rights clearly, and ensuring clients are supported throughout the process. While often required under **professional standards and guidance from the Law Society of Scotland**, much of this work remains **unpaid under the legal aid scheme**—resulting in a significant and growing volume of non-chargeable labour.

This unpaid work represents not only a **strain on the financial viability** of legal aid practices but a broader **access to justice issue**, as it creates systemic disincentives for thorough, person-centred legal support for the most vulnerable in society.

**Recommendation:** Recognise core legal functions as chargeable and reduce fee abatement practices that penalise diligence.

### **Conclusion**

The processes underpinning Advice and Assistance and Full Civil Legal Aid are currently characterised by avoidable complexity, duplication, and administrative burden. These systems:

- Undermine solicitor efficiency,
- Discourage legal aid participation,
- Compromise client access to justice, and
- Create structural inequality between legal aid clients and well-resourced opponents.

We strongly urge the Scottish Legal Aid Board and Scottish Government to take forward these non-legislative reforms, which would deliver immediate benefits to practitioners and the public. These changes would reduce waste, restore trust in legal professionals, and help stabilise the civil legal aid system during a period of significant strain.

### 3. Is grant funding from the Scottish Legal Aid Board helping to support access to justice? Can you provide examples of any successes or problems with this funding stream?

Grant funding from the Scottish Legal Aid Board (SLAB) plays a **crucial and positive role** in supporting access to justice, particularly in communities and areas where legal aid provision is limited or absent—commonly referred to as “legal aid deserts.” For many law centres, this funding is not only essential to sustaining day-to-day service delivery but also enables innovative, collaborative, and person-centred legal models that traditional legal aid alone cannot support.

#### Successes and Strengths:

- Grant funding supports long-term, community-based work that tackles unmet legal need, particularly in areas such as housing, homelessness, disability rights, anti-social behaviour, and employment.
- The ability to avoid case-by-case legal aid applications—although still required in some circumstances—reduces administrative burden and improves responsiveness to client needs.
- Grant funding has enabled the development of **multi-disciplinary partnerships** that integrate legal advice with welfare rights, money advice, health services, and social care—offering a more holistic and preventative approach.
- Access to a separate SLAB-managed outlays fund reduces upfront financial risk for service providers.
- Predictable income over multiple years, in some funding rounds, has supported **staff retention and long-term planning**, which is critical in specialist legal work.

These models directly align with the Scottish Government’s ambitions for a more **sustainable, trauma-informed, and person-centred justice system**, as outlined in the Justice Directorate’s policy framework and echoed by the Evans Review.

**Challenges and Problems:** However, significant challenges in the design and administration of SLAB grant funding are undermining its potential:

- **Thematic Stagnation:** The subject matter of SLAB grants has not been meaningfully reviewed in several years. As a result, critical and growing areas of legal need—such as the private rented sector, disability discrimination, and employment law and insecure work practices, are underfunded or overlooked entirely.
- **Delays in Funding Decisions and Their Impact:** Grant confirmations frequently arrive late in the financial year or as short-term extensions (e.g. three to six months), creating significant challenges for workforce planning and sustainability. Law centres must

manage staffing costs without certainty of continued support, making it difficult to take on new cases responsibly. Solicitors, bound by professional obligations to continue representation once instructed, face difficult decisions in the final quarter of the grant cycle, particularly where the case is not likely to conclude before the end of the financial year. With few alternative referral pathways available, uncertainty undermines service continuity, particularly in complex or sensitive cases where legal support is critical. The impact extends beyond organisational planning, directly affecting client casework and access to justice. Addressing delays in funding administration is essential to ensuring stable and effective access to justice.

- **Inflexible and Over-Scrutinised Agreements:** Grant agreements require extensive and detailed reporting, often focusing more on procedural compliance than on measurable impact. While accountability is essential, the current approach places a heavy administrative burden on delivery organisations, limiting their ability to focus on service delivery. Strengthening collaboration and ensuring reporting requirements are proportionate would help align oversight with meaningful outcomes while maintaining transparency and accountability.
- **No Inflationary Uplift:** What may have started as full cost recovery no longer reflects true service costs. With no consistent inflationary increases for over a decade, many law centres are now effectively having to meet the shortfall. This erodes financial sustainability and risks burnout among staff delivering high-intensity, trauma-informed services.

#### **Recommendations for a Reformed and Strategic Model:**

We believe SLAB grant funding could play a **pivotal role** in supporting access to justice—but only if it evolves in line with the realities of frontline delivery. We recommend that SLAB and the Scottish Government:

- Commit to **longer-term funding cycles** (e.g. 3–5 years), to support stability and innovation.
- Review and revise grant subject areas to ensure they reflect **current and emerging legal need**, in consultation with providers.
- Introduce **inflationary uplifts** to preserve the real value of grants and ensure viability.
- Embed **flexibility** to support multi-agency and holistic delivery models, recognising the role of law centres as both legal and community organisations.
- Shift evaluation and reporting away from procedural micromanagement and toward **meaningful, outcome-focused accountability**.

Grant funding, when structured effectively, allows law centres and other statutory and voluntary sector partners to reach communities who would otherwise face insurmountable barriers to asserting their legal rights. It must be **strategic, sustainable, and sufficiently resourced** to continue fulfilling that role.

## **4. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the current system for providing civil legal assistance?**



We have outlined the main weaknesses in the current system above, and individual law centres will provide further detail and examples in their own submissions. From a law centre perspective, however, there are significant strengths that should be acknowledged and preserved.

One of the core strengths is the broad scope of civil legal aid in Scotland, which continues to cover key areas of public law such as housing, immigration, employment, equality, mental health and human rights. This enables vulnerable individuals to access essential legal support to resolve issues that directly affect their safety, security, and well-being.

The judicare model also remains a valuable element of the system. It offers flexibility and client choice, while allowing legal aid providers to deliver a wide range of legal services within their communities. Where adequately supported, this model facilitates effective, holistic legal support that is responsive to local need.

Law centres have consistently shown how the existing framework, if reformed and properly resourced, can deliver accessible, high-quality, rights-based legal services. With targeted improvements to funding, eligibility, and administration, the system has the potential to offer a sustainable and inclusive model for access to justice.

## **5. What do you think would be the strengths and weaknesses of reforming civil legal assistance along the lines recommended in the Evans Review (“Rethinking Legal Aid”, 2018)?**

The Evans Review provided a helpful starting point for discussion about the future of civil legal assistance in Scotland. However, from the perspective of law centres, there were two key limitations in the review: (1) it did not go far enough, and (2) it did not fully engage with some of the more serious structural problems it identified. While it laid out some high-level ambitions, the absence of detailed proposals limited its practical impact.

**1. Lack of scope - Funding and Resourcing:** One of the most significant gaps in the review was its treatment of legal aid funding. The review noted a lack of evidence on whether the system was under-resourced and stopped short of drawing any conclusions. Although the subsequent establishment of the Payment Review Panel led to some modest improvements, this omission weakened the overall impact of the review. In our view, more proactive investigation into funding adequacy should have been central to the work.

**2. Lack of scope - Linking Legal Aid to Broader Public Outcomes:** The review also missed an opportunity to embed legal aid within Scotland’s wider policy framework. It briefly supported the idea of an outcomes-based approach, linked to the national performance framework, but offered no practical examples or clear vision for implementation. In areas such as homelessness prevention, poverty reduction, and support for disabled people, legal aid plays a demonstrable role in delivering key government objectives. However, the review did not explore these connections in any meaningful way.

**3. Restrictions on Grant Funding Since Review:** While the Evans Review acknowledged the importance of grant funding in supporting innovation and addressing unmet legal need, progress in this area has stalled—and in many respects, conditions have worsened since 2018. At the time of the review, the Scottish Legal Aid Board (SLAB) already held grant-awarding

powers, which it was using in limited but important ways. The review recommended that these powers be further developed to expand support for targeted, preventative legal services. However, the scale and reach of grant funding has since contracted significantly.

By 2022–23, SLAB’s total grant funding had fallen to £3.6 million. In 2023–24, this dropped further to £2.3 million. This sharp decline has undermined the sustainability of many long-established, community-based services, particularly those embedded in the third sector and focused on delivering early legal help in areas such as housing, welfare rights, and disability discrimination.

Some of this reduction coincided with the modest uplift in the hourly rate for advice and assistance. However, this came at the cost of terminating or winding down key grant-funded programmes, resulting in a net loss of capacity overall. Critically, several grant programmes had already experienced years of frozen funding levels, even before the review. This has led to a situation in which solicitor salaries supported through SLAB grants now fall well below market levels—sometimes even below the minimum wage threshold. These roles now attract significantly lower pay than equivalent positions within SLAB itself, including solicitor posts at Civil Legal Aid offices.

This disparity is not only unsustainable but fundamentally undermines efforts to promote rights-based, trauma-informed legal practice in the community. The failure to maintain and grow grant investment runs counter to wider public commitments to social justice and early intervention. Without reform, grant funding risks becoming a diminishing resource rather than a vehicle for innovation and equitable access to justice.

**4. Lack of Detail on Practical Reforms:** While the Evans Review identified several important areas for potential reform, it too often stopped short of offering the level of analysis or specificity needed to support meaningful change. This limitation appears throughout the report and significantly weakens its capacity to inform practical implementation.

For example, the review rightly highlighted the need to better align applications for advice and assistance with those for full civil legal aid, suggesting a more streamlined process would reduce duplication and administrative burden. However, it offered little insight into the structural or procedural barriers that currently prevent such alignment. There was no examination of the technical, operational, or regulatory challenges involved, nor any proposals on how these might be addressed. As a result, the recommendation lacks the depth necessary to be translated into workable reform.

Similarly, the review raised the issue of integrating lay advice provision—such as that provided by Citizens Advice Bureaux—with more formal legal representation by solicitors. This is a potentially important area for development, especially given the complementary strengths of both sectors. However, the report touched on only one possible model for such integration, without assessing alternative approaches or reflecting on the risks, limitations, or necessary safeguards. These omissions are significant, as effective collaboration between lay advisors and solicitors requires careful design, clear delineation of roles, and consistent standards of accountability.

Overall, while the review surfaced some of the right questions, it did not go far enough in exploring the practical implications of reform. A more detailed, implementation-focused approach—grounded in the realities of frontline service delivery—would have added

significant value and moved the sector closer to achieving the outcomes the review aspired to.

**Conclusion** The Evans Review offered a welcome platform to rethink civil legal assistance in Scotland, and many of its principles—such as a more person-centred, flexible, and outcomes-based model—remain relevant. However, its limited scope and lack of follow-through have left many of the systemic issues it identified unresolved. In the absence of further development, the review’s potential has not yet been realised.

## 6. What are your priorities for longer-term reform?

**Sustainable Funding Models:** Implementing long-term, inflation-adjusted funding to ensure the viability of legal aid services, particularly in underserved areas.

**Fair Remuneration:** Reviewing and adjusting fee structures to reflect the complexity and time commitment of cases, ensuring that legal aid work is financially sustainable for solicitors.

**Simplified Administrative Processes:** Streamlining application and reporting procedures to reduce administrative burdens, allowing solicitors to focus more on client representation.

**Expanded Eligibility Criteria:** Reassessing financial eligibility thresholds to broaden access to legal aid, ensuring that more individuals can obtain necessary legal support.

**Enhanced Collaboration:** Fostering partnerships between legal aid providers, community organisations, and government bodies to address systemic issues and provide holistic support to clients.

**Integration of Technology:** Leveraging digital tools to improve access to legal information and services, particularly for individuals in remote or rural areas. However, it is essential to also address the issue of digital exclusion, which disproportionately affects disadvantaged communities, including those with limited access to technology, low digital literacy, or inadequate internet connectivity. Ensuring that digital services are accessible to all requires investing in digital inclusion initiatives, such as providing affordable devices, improving internet access in underserved areas, and offering digital literacy training to ensure that vulnerable individuals can fully benefit from online legal resources and services.

## 7. If you have any other comments on this inquiry, please share them with us.

Law centres emphasise the critical role of legal aid in upholding justice and protecting the rights of vulnerable populations. To strengthen the system:

**Recognise Legal Aid as a Public Service:** Position legal aid as an essential public service, integral to the justice system and societal well-being.

The provision of advice and assistance, and legal aid for a comprehensive range of legal issues is very important. While we call for an expansion in grant funding, it would be counter-productive to reduce the availability of legal assistance in general.

**Address Workforce Challenges:** Implement strategies to attract and retain legal aid solicitors, including mentorship programs, career development opportunities, and competitive compensation.

**Incorporate User Feedback:** Establish mechanisms to regularly gather and incorporate feedback from legal aid recipients to inform service improvements.

**Ensure Transparency and Accountability:** Maintain open communication regarding policy changes, funding decisions, and performance metrics to build trust among stakeholders.

Law centres remain committed to collaborating with policymakers, the Scottish Legal Aid Board, and other stakeholders to advance reforms that enhance the effectiveness and reach of legal aid services.